

*Building a Community for Student Success: Psychological Sense of Community in the Teaching and Learning Communities Programs at Pasadena City College*

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### Executive Summary

The programs and resources of the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) at Pasadena City College (PCC) promote active and collaborative learning, using community-building and innovative classroom strategies to help students move from basic skills courses to vocational and transfer courses.

This evaluation of the TLC programs focused on three key questions:

1. Is a stronger psychological sense of community (PSOC) being generated among TLC students, as compared to similar PCC students who do not participate in the programs?
2. If a strong sense of community is found, does it relate positively to outcomes such as success, retention, academic achievement, self-efficacy, and social support?
3. If a robust sense of community exists, how does this factor relate to students' interaction with the TLC community?

- Two focus groups were conducted (11 and 8 participants respectively) with TLC students. These focus groups involved a discussion of community at PCC and a "community mapping" exercise. **Analysis of the focus group discussions and community maps indicated that community exists in the TLC, and this sense of community is strong and well defined. Further, the qualitative data suggests that program participants hold a clear conception of the TLC community, identify and connect with this community, experience success through the TLC programs, and feel a sense of responsibility to others in the TLC community.**
- A survey of PCC students (N = 139; 80 TLC, 59 non-TLC) was also conducted. The self report survey included measures of psychological sense of community ( $\alpha = .94$ ), social support ( $\alpha = .94$ ), self efficacy ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and community interaction ( $\alpha = .85$ ). **Examination of the self report data indicated that a greater psychological sense of community has been generated among program participants than non-program students.** TLC students also reported significantly greater social support, but not greater self-efficacy, when compared to non-TLC students. PSOC was positively related to social support and self-efficacy, but not success, retention, course grades, or GPA.
- TLC students reported interacting with other students and teachers most often, and they viewed learning and studying as the most important reasons for visiting the TLC center. Holding a strong sense of community was predictive of interacting with: the TLC community overall, students, teachers, tutors, and staff.

Holding a strong sense of community was also predictive of viewing learning, tutoring, and socializing as important reasons for visiting the TLC center.

**Overall, the TLC programs' efforts to build a community of learners are succeeding.** In addition social support was found to be a positive correlate of promoting community in the TLC. Possibly most importantly, the evidence suggests that program participants experience the link between the TLC community and their success as a student.

It is recommended that the community-building efforts of the TLC programs be continued and further developed so as to capitalize on related psychological benefits, and students' perceived connection between their TLC community ties, sense of accountability, and their academic performance be further fostered and supported.